

WRITING WINNING PROPOSALS

What Evaluators Look for in a Winning Proposal

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PURPOSE

- Participants: Become more competitive in the Federal Government/Prime Contractor Marketplace
 - ▼ Win more jobs
 - ▼ Perform them well and at a profit
 - Agencies/Primes: Develop additional vendors who know how to do business with us (and them)
 - ▼ Implement Small Business (SB), Small-disadvantaged business (SDB) and Women-owned business (WB) initiatives
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Delight our sponsors with outstanding contractors OBJECTIVES

- Provide basics of the Government (and Prime Contractor) Source Selection Process
- Get the "**Big Picture**" and be able to ask the right questions
- Learn about **Areas of Emphasis** in competitive evaluated procurements
 - ▼ What the buyer is looking for
 - ▼ How your proposal is graded
 - ▼ How to do oral discussions well (and avoid pitfalls)

LECTURE OUTLINE

- Pre-RFP Activities
 - Proposal Preparation Period
 - Initial Evaluation\Scoring of Proposals
 - Oral Discussions (Including BAFOs)
 - Final Evaluation
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Pre-RFP Govt./Prime Contractor Activities

- Acquisition Strategy Issues
 - ▼ **Goal:** Meet minimum agency/prime need, on time, at a reasonable cost
 - ▼ **Steps Required:**
 - Identify MISSION NEED
 - Develop SOW, SPECS, STANDARDS
 - Develop EVALUATION CRITERIA
 - Develop REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP)
 - Apply criteria to proposals to make source selection
-

OBSTACLES TO THE GOVT./PRIME KR.

- ▼ Large/R&D Contracts Commonly Impacted by:
 - Advances in Technology
 - Changes in Program Requirements
 - Funding Constraints
 - Unrealistic Estimates
 - Defective or Ambiguous Specs
 - Unk Unks
 - ▼ Challenges
 - Govt./Prime - Still get the job done
 - Proposer- Still win the job and earn a profit
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THE PLAYERS

- Source Selection Team
 - ▼ Contracting Officer
 - ▼ Cognizant Technical Official
 - ▼ Team Members
 - ▼ Program Manager
- Outside Influences

- ▼ Rulemakers - Agencies and Congress: Using Regs and Laws (e.g., CICA)
 - ▼ Arbiters - GAO, Courts and Boards: Handling Protests of Awards
-

AGENCY/PRIME's FIRST STEPS

- Before Addressing Source Selection, Agency Must:
 - ▼ Decide what to buy
 - ▼ Find sources
 - ▼ Use acquisition planning and market surveys (**FAR 7.102**)
 - Defining the Job
 - ▼ Goal = Describe desired performance in RFP
 - ▼ Methods = Drawings, technical documents, specs, standards, etc.
 - ▼ Constraints: **FAR 10.004** = State only minimum needs; describe to promote full and open competition
 - ▼ Unduly restrictive specs are prohibited (award will be overturned)
-

AGENCY/PRIME's FIRST STEPS (Cont.)

- Market Research
 - ▼ Competition depends on our understanding of the marketplace
 - ▼ We must begin early and use a full range of techniques to see what (and who) is out there
 - ▼ If agency requests information, respond fully and promptly
 - Compile Source List
 - ▼ Use Commerce Business Daily (CBD) for jobs > \$25,000
 - ▼ Use office's bidders lists
 - ▼ Advertise to trade associations, in the media, etc.
 - ▼ Determine whether the job can be a set-aside
-

GOVT. 's SOURCE SELECTION PLAN

- Contents
 - ▼ Part I - Organization, membership and team responsibilities
 - ▼ Part II - Evaluation criteria and procedures for evaluating proposals
- Source Evaluation Team - General
 - ▼ Contracting Officer (C.O.) - Handles solicitations and negotiations; may also be the Source Selection Official (SSO)
 - ▼ Cognizant technical official - responsible for the technical requirements
 - ▼ C.O. may form teams (committees)

- Technical, management, cost
 - Consultants (e.g., legal, financial, QA, RA, etc)
 - Source Evaluation Team - Major Procurements
 - ▼ May appoint program manager
 - ▼ May use committees & source selection officials
 - ▼ DOD 4-step selection process
 - ▼ NASA Source Evaluation Board (SEB) process
 - Who Are These People?
 - ▼ Qualified, experienced functional experts
 - ▼ Balance of program expertise vs. independence
 - ▼ Nobody with conflict of interest
 - ▼ Very busy and not completely familiar with the contract effort
 - ▼ It's in your interest to analyze your likely evaluators
 - Cover all areas of their interest
 - Don't assume they know the job, or the merits of your approach, or the strong points of your company
 - Make it easy for them to locate data in your proposal
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DEVELOPING EVALUATION FACTORS

- Purpose of Factors
 - ▼ To fully assess your ability to meet the contract requirements
 - ▼ To determine the relative merits of competing proposers
 - Strategy for Developing Factors
 - ▼ **FAR 15.605** guidance
 - Tailor factors for each acquisition
 - Include only those that will impact source selection
 - Price (or cost) and quality are always factors
 - *Note:* Agencies have great discretion in formulating factors and weightings
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DEVELOPING EVALUATION FACTORS (Cont.)

- Why Important?
 - ▼ Every RFP is different (Don't assume factors will be the same as last time)
 - ▼ It only pays to excel in the listed factors
 - ▼ You must have the best cost/price or the best total package with a reasonable price (Read the RFP)
 - ▼ Your proposal must show you meet the contract requirements and represent the best buy against the RFP's priorities

Types of Evaluation Factors

- Technical
 - Management
 - Cost or Price
 - Other Factors
 - ▼ Financial Capability
 - ▼ Past Performance
-

Example 1- Technical Criterion and Factors (JPL)

■ DESIGN CONCEPT

The degree to which the proposed design concept will result in the development of hardware capable of meeting the technical requirements.

Factors to be considered are as follows:

OVERALL SUBSYSTEM DESIGN

The proposed subsystem design concept should reflect subassemblies that can be readily fabricated using existing state-of-the art methods.

The subsystem design should clearly define all the interfaces of the subassemblies. The most satisfactory interface would be one where there is a minimum impact on each assembly making up the interface.

Example 1- Technical Criterion and Factors (JPL)- Cont.

• DESIGN CONCEPT (Cont.)

– ACCEPTABILITY OF EXISTING HARDWARE

- The design concept should require a minimum of new hardware development and if required, should not be difficult to develop

The selection of existing hardware should show a minimum of design changes necessary to adapt the existing hardware to meet the design requirements

Example 1- Technical Criterion and Factors (JPL)- Cont.

■ DESIGN CONCEPT (Cont.)

- ▼ Design Concept for the High-Power, Solid-State Amplifiers as it

Relates to Generating High Peak Power

The design concept for the high-power, solid-state amplifiers should evidence an understanding of the problems and potential solutions for semiconductor failure due to excessive heat

Example 2- Resources Criterion and Factors (JPL)

■ RESOURCES

THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE PROPOSED TECHNICAL PERSONNEL, FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT ARE AVAILABLE AND SUITABLE FOR PERFORMANCE OF THE EFFORT SET FORTH IN THE SPECIMEN CONTRACT. FACTORS TO BE CONSIDERED:

AVAILABILITY OF PERSONNEL

The staffing charts should show an understanding of the loading of personnel required for the program. The proposal should show that a qualified labor base is available, and the need for new hires is minimal.

Example 2- Resources Criterion and Factors (JPL) (Cont.)

■ RESOURCES (Cont.)

▼ QUALIFICATION OF PERSONNEL

The education and related experience of the proposed technical personnel should show they are capable of performing their assigned tasks. The technical team proposed should have participated in preparing the proposal.

Example 2- Resources Criterion and Factors (JPL) (Cont.)

■ RESOURCES (Cont.)

▼ FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT

Test facilities should be adequate and available for performing necessary structural and thermal development and verification tests

Test facilities should include a well-equipped lab for performing accurate VSWR and insertion loss measurement at L-band frequencies

- Proposed facilities should meet clean room standards and have controlled access requirements IAW MIL-STD. 123*
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Example 3- Management Criterion and Factors **(JPL)**

■ MANAGEMENT PLANS

THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE PROPOSED MANAGEMENT PLANS ARE SUITABLE FOR ORGANIZATION, IMPLEMENTATION AND CONTROL OF THE PROGRAM. FACTORS TO BE CONSIDERED:

PROPOSED ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE

The proposed technical and management assignments should indicate a program management organization that is complete and well-defined. The organization should not be overly complex or too large for the effort.

Example 3- Management Criterion and Factors **(JPL)**

PROPOSED ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE (Cont.)

The program management organization should integrate well into the overall company. Effective lines of authority and communication should be evident, and the various technical and management functions should effectively interact.

PROGRAM MANAGER'S AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

The program manager's authority should be adequate to command the resources necessary for contract performance. The PM should have full responsibility for all program elements

Example 3- Management Criterion and Factors **(JPL)**

PROGRAM MANAGER'S AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITY (Cont.)

The program manager should have ready access to upper management to resolve problems beyond the PM's authority and control

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR CONDUCTING THE EFFORT

The breakdown of the effort into its component work items, as shown by the WBS, should logically and completely identify all major tasks and sub-tasks

Example 3- Management Criterion and Factors (JPL)

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR CONDUCTING THE EFFORT (Cont.)

The network schedule should show an orderly process from development to completion of the task. Milestones should be sufficient to clearly convey that information

The summary network schedule should identify major milestones. In addition, the major milestones should show the proposer's capability to meet the performance and delivery schedule of the specimen contract

Example 3- Management Criterion and Factors (JPL)

PROGRAM CONTROL PLAN

The program control plan should consist of a well-thought-out procedure for ensuring adequate visibility and control of cost, performance and schedule

The system to be used for financial status and progress reporting should provide timely and accurate information. Regular review of the program by upper management should be included

Example 4- Cost Factor (NASA)

■ COST FACTOR

The evaluation team will evaluate the total proposed cost of this requirement to determine the realism and validity of the proposed cost for the required effort

Example 5- Related Experience Factor (NASA)

■ RELEVANT EXPERIENCE AND PAST PERFORMANCE FACTOR

This category is an evaluation of overall corporate or offeror experience, not individual or key personnel experience. Subfactors generally consist of the following:

Experience in accomplishing work which is comparable or related to the effort required under this procurement. The team will review projects presented by an offeror which reflect a comparable magnitude of effort including technical, cost, schedule and management elements or constraints similar to those expected in this requirement

Example 5- Related Experience Factor (NASA)(Cont.)

■ RELEVANT EXPERIENCE AND PAST PERFORMANCE FACTOR (Cont.)

Past performance, or how well an offeror did on earlier work, can be a very significant indicator of how well the offeror can be expected to perform on this requirement. The team will review projects presented by an offeror and will evaluate characteristics such as resilience in the face of trouble, resourcefulness, management determinations to see that an organization lives up to certain commitments or standards, and skill in development and utilization of key personnel

Example 6- "Other Factors" Factor (NASA)

■ OTHER CONSIDERATIONS FACTORS

- ▼ Other considerations which will be evaluated by the team include:
 - Financial condition and capability
 - Priority placed by corporate level or company owners on the work being proposed, or importance of the business to the offeror
 - Stability of labor-management relations
 - Extent of proposed small business/SDB/WO business subcontracting
 - Use of subcontracts in labor surplus areas
-

DEVELOPING THE RATING SYSTEM

- Relative Weights
 - ▼ Agency must determine relative importance of the factors, but can choose its method

- Fixed weights (e.g., 400 points for design, 350 points for management, 150 points for fab. and test)
- Variable weights (e.g., "If technical proposals are relatively equal, cost becomes more important")

Priority or tradeoff analysis (e.g., look at technical and management differences between proposers and decide if differences warrant price differential)

- Go/No-Go (e.g., "If the product does not pass life test, the entire proposal is unacceptable")

- Indeterminate weights (e.g., "The factors are listed in descending order of importance")

- ▼ Cost/price is frequently unweighted!
-

Why Care About Weights?

- - ▼ Put the bulk of your proposal effort into the big ticket items
 - ▼ Figure out the cost/price strategy the agency is using
 - ▼ Put yourself in the role of the selection official (Given the tradeoff specified, would you select the company?)
 - ▼ No bid if you can't meet go/no-go criteria
 - ▼ No bid if you aren't competitive against the factors and other proposers

Relative Weights (Cont.)

Indeterminate Weights ("The factors are listed in descending order of importance")

NOTE: Cost/Price is frequently unweighted

DEVELOPING THE RATING SYSTEM (Cont.)

- Why Weights should be important to you
 - ▼ You want to put the majority of your effort into the "E ticket" items
 - ▼ You want to figure out which cost/price strategy the agency is using
 - ▼ Put yourself in the position of the SSO- would you pick your company, given the tradeoff specified in the RFP?
 - ▼ If you can't meet the go-no criteria, NO BID
 - ▼ If you aren't competitive, vis a vis the factors (and other proposers,

DEVELOPING THE SCORING SYSTEM

■ General Considerations

- ▼ Method must be rational and applied in good faith
 - ▼ Method must compare proposals to contract requirements/criteria and against each other
 - ▼ Score or ranking does not automatically determine selection
 - You're too expensive
 - You have a critical weakness
-

DEVELOPING THE SCORING SYSTEM (Cont.)

■ Methods

- ▼ Adjectives
 - Qualitative words (e.g., Superior, VG, Acceptable, Poor, Unacceptable)
 - Color codes (e.g., Blue, Green, Yellow, Red)
 - Symbols (e.g. +, 0, -)
 - ▼ Numerical Scores (e.g., 0, .1, .2 to 1.0)
 - ▼ Narratives- Supplements the rating or score
 - Uses strengths and weaknesses
 - Includes risks (to agency)
-

DEVELOPING THE SCORING SYSTEM (Cont.)

■ Methods (Cont.)

- ▼ Rankings (e.g., rank proposals in descending order without numerical scores)

■ Why Scoring is Important to you

- ▼ Once in a while RFP states that highest score gets the award
 - ▼ Agency can't select you if you are unacceptable in any significant area
 - ▼ If you don't score high enough, you may be eliminated from the competitive range
 - Don't assume you can get well later
-

Proposal Preparation Period- Initial Steps

■ Read and Analyze the RFP

- ▼ Section C - Description/specs/SOW
 - Identify minimum, mandatory requirements (If you don't meet, you're non-responsive)
 - Identify requirements that are difficult to satisfy or where competitors are ahead of you
 - Identify areas which offer you a competitive advantage
 - Identify any requirements that unduly restrict competition
 - ▼ Section D - Deliveries or performance
 - Verify you can meet schedule
 - ▼ Section H - Special contract requirements
 - Ensure you meet these
 - Make Immediate Bid/No-Bid Decision
 - ▼ Consider your ability to perform the job successfully
 - ▼ Consider business risks vs. benefits
 - ▼ Assess Your competitive standing
 - Consult Legal Counsel Immediately if You Identify Unduly Restrictive Features
 - ▼ Protests must be filed prior to due date for proposals
 - Establish a Proposal Team
 - ▼ Someone must be in charge
 - ▼ Obtain functional specialists in all areas of requirements compliance or evaluation factors
 - Establish a proposal schedule
 - ▼ Allow time for graphics, printing, repro, shipment
 - ▼ Allow time for revision of cost/price proposal to reflect technical/management changes
 - ▼ Allow time for management review
-

Proposal Preparation Period- Initial Steps (Cont.)

- ▼ Section H- Special Contract Requirements (Cont.)
 - Ensure you include their impact in your cost/price proposal
- ▼ Section J - List of attachments
 - The real technical requirements are often in these exhibits!
- ▼ Section L - Instructions, conditions, notices to offerors
 - Compare the proposal instructions to the evaluation factors (The combination equals the rules of the competition)
 - Determine if you can submit an alternate proposal
- ▼ Section M - Evaluation factors for award
 - Understand factors, subfactors, and relative importance
 - Determine relative importance of technical/management vs. cost/price

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- Understand the overall basis for contract award
-

Proposal Preparation Period- Initial Steps (Cont.)

Make immediate decision whether or not to bid

Consider your ability to successfully perform the job

- ▼ Consider benefit vs. business risk
- Assess your potential competition

- Consult legal counsel immediately if proposal is unduly restrictive
 - ▼ Protests must be filed before due date for proposals
 - Establish a Proposal Team
 - ▼ Make sure someone is the focal point for the proposal
 - ▼ Use functional specialists for eval. factors/compliance areas
-

Proposal Preparation Period- Initial Steps (Cont.)

- Establish a Proposal Schedule
 - ▼ Allow time for the following:
 - Graphics, printing, repro, shipment
 - Revision of cost/price proposal to reflect technical/management changes
 - Management/legal review
-

FOLLOW-UP STEPS

- Improve your chances for winning the job
 - ▼ Obtain technical documents to enhance your understanding of the job
 - ▼ If the agency opens a "library" for proposers, use it
 - ▼ Find out what has and has not worked in the past
- Generate a Compliance Matrix
 - ▼ List every requirement of the SOW and specs
 - ▼ Do you meet, exceed, or fail to meet each one?
 - If you don't meet, find a way to comply - or no-bid
 - If you exceed, determine whether any cost impact of exceeding is worth it
- Determine Your Proposal Strategy
 - ▼ Identify the customer's critical requirements and brainstorm possible solutions that are cost-effective
 - ▼ Create a proposal theme (why you should be selected)

- "Leading experts in the country"
 - "Highest reliability"
 - "Low life cycle cost"
 - "Innovative approach solves the hazardous materials problem"
 - ▼ Choose a proposal development method
 - Compliance method: Repeat each requirement, explain how you meet it, and substantiate
 - Positioning method: Differentiate your product/service from others and show the differences are valuable
 - Storyboarding method: Outline a "story" with themes and selling points
 - Evaluation outlining method: Detailed topical outline based on factors, subfactors and instructions
 - ▼ Determine your pricing strategy (e.g., set a target cost)
 - Carefully Review the Proposal Instructions
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FOLLOW-UP STEPS (cont.)

- Determine Your Proposal Strategy
 - ▼ Identify the customer's critical requirements and brainstorm possible solutions that are cost-effective
 - ▼ Create a proposal theme (why you should be selected)
 - "Leading experts in the country"
 - "Highest reliability"
 - "Low life cycle cost"
 - "Innovative approach solves the hazardous materials problem"
 - ▼ Choose a proposal development method
 - Compliance method: Repeat each requirement, explain how you meet it, and substantiate
-

FOLLOW-UP STEPS (cont.)

- Choose a Proposal Development Method
 - Determine your pricing strategy (target cost)
 - CAREFULLY REVIEW THE PROPOSAL INSTRUCTIONS
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Example 1: Management Instructions (JPL)

- Organization Plan
 - ▼ Provide an organization chart (or charts) and sufficient supplemental narrative to fully describe the following:

A chart of the program management organization to be used to perform the proposed effort. Identify key technical and management personnel who will be assigned.

- A chart showing the position of the program management organization within the overall company or corporate organization
- The authority of the program manager to command and control the resources (e.g., personnel, finances, facilities) and subcontracts necessary for contract performance.
-

Example 1: Management Instructions (JPL)

(Cont.)

■ Organization Plan (Cont.)

The procedure to be followed by the program manager in obtaining decisions beyond the PM's authority in resolving conflicts for resources not under the PM's control.

■ Program Control Plan

Provide a program control plan. This plan should describe the procedure to be followed for monitoring and control of cost, performance and schedule. Describe in detail the system for reporting financial status and progress, both internally and to JPL. Identify the management level responsible for reviewing the financial status and program reports and taking corrective action as appropriate.

Example 1: Management Instructions (JPL)

(Cont.)

■ Program Control Plan (Cont.)

Include a discussion of the plan for subcontractor management. In particular, discuss the methods by which the requirements will be implemented and technical, schedule, and cost monitored.

Example 2: Related Experience and Other Factors

Instruct.

Relevant Experience and Past Performance and Other Considerations - Volume II (NASA)

The relevant experience and past performance and other considerations proposal should be formatted in two separate sections, one for relevant experience and past performance, and a separate one for other considerations. Volume II should parallel, to the maximum extent possible, the format of the relevant experience and past performance and other

considerations criteria outlined in section M.1(B) of this solicitation. As a minimum, your proposal must include the following:

–

If applicable, identify your labor management history with specifics such as dates of organization attempts and results, lost days as absolute and percentages, etc. Historic information is requested over the last three (3) years.

Example 2: Related Experience and Other Factors

Instruct.

- Relevant experience and past performance
- A statement of background experience in activities similar or related to the requirements of this solicitation.

A list of Government contracts for similar or related work in excess of \$500,000.00 received in the last three years, or currently in negotiation. For each entry, provide the contract number, the government agency placing the contract, the type of contract, a brief description of the work, the name of the contracting officer and contracting officer's technical representative, their addresses and telephone numbers.

- Identify and explain any terminations for default or terminations for the convenience of the government
-

Example 2: Related Experience and Other Factors

Instruct.

▼ Other Considerations

If subcontractors are proposed, identify those that are small businesses, disadvantaged businesses, women-owned businesses, or located in labor surplus areas.

- Furnish your last three (3) years certified financial statements.

If applicable, identify your labor management history with specifics such as dates of organization attempts and results, lost days as absolute and percentages, etc. Provide data for the last three (3) years

INTERFACE WITH THE CUSTOMER

■ Preproposal Conferences

- ▼ Purpose -- To provide additional information which proposers may need
- ▼ Content may include:
 - Question and Answer sessions

- Job walk
- Observation of on-going operations
- Overview of the project, from the customer's perspective
- ▼ It's essential that you attend!

Note: Keep in mind that the RFP takes precedence over anything presented at conference - (unless agency subsequently modifies RFP)

INTERFACE WITH THE CUSTOMER (Cont.)

- Addenda to the RFP
 - ▼ Government can amend the RFP, or answer questions, by issuing addenda
 - ▼ You must comply with the RFP as modified
 - ▼ You must acknowledge receipt of each addendum on the appropriate form (or you may be nonresponsive)
 - ▼ Call the C.O. to verify whether addenda were issued which you haven't received
- Asking Questions
 - ▼ C.O. will receive questions from proposers
 - ▼ If an answer is warranted, answer will be provided to all sources as an addendum

INTERFACE WITH THE CUSTOMER (Cont.)

- Asking Questions (Cont.)
 - ▼ If you're unsure of a requirement, send in a question
 - ▼ Holding back on questions can only hurt you
 - You may guess wrong
 - C.O. generally can't answer after proposals received
 - Unasked questions on defective specs may render you responsible during contract performance
 - Unasked questions on restrictive specs may cause you to lose a bid protest
 - ▼ Don't ask questions of anyone besides the C.O.
 - Answers aren't binding; only the RFP is
 - Answers may lead you down the wrong path

PREPARING THE PROPOSAL

- What is a proposal?
 - ▼ A legal offer - If accepted, you are legally bound to perform
 - ▼ A sales document - Demonstrates you meet the requirements and have the best solution to the RFP

- Format the Proposal to Match the Proposal Instructions
 - ▼ Include a Table of Contents
 - ▼ Put material in the volume/section specified (If evaluators can't find the data, you may be found nonresponsive)
 - ▼ Comply with any page limitation (or evaluators won't read all the pages!)
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PREPARING THE PROPOSAL (Cont.)

- Format the Proposal to match the Proposal Instructions
 - ▼ Execute all required representations and certifications (or you may be nonresponsive)
 - ▼ Consider an executive summary
 - ▼ Respond to every instruction and every requirement
 - Minimize Exceptions
 - Be Consistent (Technical/Management/Cost)
 - Be Credible - Support Your Positions
 - Use a "Red Team" Review of the Proposal
 - Submit Your Best Proposal Now - Don't Wait for Discussions (You May Not Get There!)
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How to Lose the Competition (Partial List)

- Fail to Understand What the Customer Wants
 - Misinterpret the Requirements
 - Take Exception or Otherwise Fail to Comply with the Requirements
 - Fail to Provide all Requested Information
 - Fail to Substantiate Your Statements
 - Put Data Where Evaluators Can't Find It
 - Unrealistic Schedules, Pricing, or Technological Advances
 - Deliver the Proposal Late!
-

Initial Evaluation of Proposals- How Does the Agency Evaluate?

- By Using Only the Factors in the RFP
 - ▼ Changes in factors require addendum to RFP and opportunity to respond
- By Using Only Permissible Information
 - ▼ Primarily relying on proposals

- ▼ Obtaining reports from consultants, pre-award surveys, field pricing audits
- ▼ Other data only if stated in RFP (e.g., reference checks, testing)
- ▼ Government can't go beyond this to ensure you're capable
- ▼ Government can't ignore deficiencies in proposal by referring to outside data

Initial Evaluation of Proposals- How Does the Agency Evaluate?

- You Must Furnish, in the Proposal, all the Data the Evaluators Need!

WHO PERFORMS THE EVALUATIONS?

- Various Procedures are Used
 - ▼ Committees May Evaluate Different Areas (e.g., Past Performance Assessment Committee)
 - ▼ Entire Committee Need Not Read Every Proposal - OK to Divide Proposals Among People
 - ▼ BAFOs Can be Reviewed by a New Set of People
- You Need to Know How the Agency Will Perform the Evaluation
 - ▼ NASA SEBs
 - ▼ DOD 4-Steps
 - ▼ NASA SBIRs
 - ▼ Other

PROPOSAL EVALUATION - GENERALLY

- How the Evaluators Do Their Job
 - ▼ Review RFP requirements
 - ▼ Analyze company's approach vs. requirements
 - ▼ Generate strengths, weaknesses and questions against each factor
 - ▼ Consensus, as appropriate
 - ▼ Apply rating system to the data
- Evaluation Procedure Is Strictly Followed

PROPOSAL EVALUATION - SPECIFIC TECHNIQUES

- Example 1 - Technical Evaluation

Subfactor includes: "Evaluate the offeror's capability and methodology for deriving detailed design requirements and solutions to technical problems based on the SOW. . ."

Instructions include: "A narrative should elaborate on the technical comprehension of the diverse performance requirements, their implications and interrelationships, identification of subordinate requirements and methodologies . . ."

PROPOSAL EVALUATION - SPECIFIC TECHNIQUES

■ Scoring Scheme:

- ▼ Red = unacceptable
- ▼ Yellow = Marginal
- ▼ Green = Acceptable
- ▼ Blue = Exceptional

Company A Proposes: "We have proven our substantial systems engineering capabilities on the X and Y contracts. We will make full use of system engineering techniques to meet all of the agency's requirements."

Company B: "Figure 1 is a compliance matrix indicating our compliance with all of the performance requirements. Figure 2 indicates the derived subordinate requirements."

PROPOSAL EVALUATION - SPECIFIC TECHNIQUES

Company C: Figure 1 is supplemented by the following narrative, demonstrating which performance requirements are difficult to achieve. Engineering analysis is provided to show how we will accomplish the requirements. Figure 2 shows similar data in derived requirements (by analysis) down to the assembly (piece-part) level.

PROPOSAL EVALUATION - SPECIFIC TECHNIQUES

• Example 2 - Management Evaluation

- Subfactor is: "PROGRAM CONTROL PLAN"

Instructions include: "Discuss the plan for subcontractor management. Discuss the methods by which the requirements will be implemented and technical, schedule and cost monitored."

- Scoring Scheme:

- Superior = Minimal weaknesses
- Very Good = Strengths outweigh weaknesses

- Acceptable = Adequate
 - Poor = Needs improvement
 - Unacceptable = Not discussed or not fixable
-

PROPOSAL EVALUATION - SPECIFIC TECHNIQUE

Company A: "We'll perform a make-or-buy decision on 12 items. Depending on whom we subcontract to, we'll decide which of our 27 monitoring tools will be applied. We always do this well."

Company B: "Our subcontractors will be identified within 60 days. For cost-type subcontracts, we will request NASA 533 data, a monthly progress report, and a quarterly status review at the subcontractor's facility."

Company C: "Figure 1 lists our subs. Section 1 explains why each was selected. Section 2 includes schedules for the 7 major subs. The other 3 provide summary GANTT charts, which are included. Each company reports against these by weekly telecon . . . for the non-fixed price subs, we receive NASA 533 data monthly . . . etc."

PROPOSAL EVALUATION - SPECIFIC TECHNIQUES

- Example 3 - Related Experience Evaluation
 - ▼ Factor includes: "Experience in the accomplishment of work which is comparable or related to this effort."
 - ▼ Instructions include: "A list of Government contracts for similar or related work in excess of \$500K in the last 3 years."
 - ▼ Scoring scheme: Go/No-Go
 - Company A: No-bid the RFP because it didn't have any such Government contracts.

Company B: "We have no Government contracts as specified. Our directly relevant experience comes from 3 Government subcontracts and 2 major commercial jobs, which are described in the following section."

PROPOSAL EVALUATION - SPECIFIC TECHNIQUES

Company C: Immediately after receiving the RFP, it sent a question to the C.O. asking if Government subcontract and commercial contract data could be used to demonstrate adequate related experience. (Addendum to the RFP revised the instructions to permit this.)

- Cost/Price Evaluation
 - ▼ Review SF 1411 & cost or pricing data

- ▼ Obtain field support audit, if required (e.g., DCAA)
- ▼ Review individual elements of cost and proposed profit/fee
- ▼ Fixed price - Determine proposer's capability and understanding of job (no adjustment by agency)

PROPOSAL EVALUATION - SPECIFIC TECHNIQUES

■ Cost/Price Evaluation (Cont.)

Cost-reimbursement - Determine the above and evaluate realism of proposed cost (agency will generate "probable cost" after discussions)

- ▼ May or may not be scored
- ▼ Generate cost questions for discussions

AWARD ON INITIAL PROPOSALS

- Submit a proposal that is competitive, yet is one with which you can live
- **Why?** Government can buy proposal "as is"
 - C.O. can make award now if
 - lowest overall cost **AND** technically acceptable
- This is becoming more popular (BAFO scandals)
- Rarely done for cost contracts (discussions required)
- **Read your RFP:** Agency cannot award without discussions unless RFP permits

Competitive Range Determination

Unless award is made on initial proposals, Government must conduct discussions with all proposers who are found to be in the "competitive range" (CR)

- If you don't make the CR, you've lost
- CR = Those proposers who have a reasonable chance of receiving the award
 - ▼ Not a predetermined number or score
 - ▼ Not those who are "acceptable" or higher
- Decision depends on all the facts - cost/price and RFP factors

Competitive Range Determination (Cont.)

- If there is any doubt, include in CR

- But if proposer doesn't meet (and isn't expected to after discussions) a mandatory requirement, drop from CR
 - Your proposal as submitted must be your best shot - or you may not stay in the competition!
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DISCUSSIONS

- Why Does the Agency Hold Discussions?
 - ▼ Verify/revise strengths and weaknesses
 - ▼ Penetrate basis of estimate for proposed cost/price
 - ▼ Assess proposed personnel face-to-face
 - ▼ Verify adequacy of facilities and equipment
 - ▼ Government only - allow opportunity to cure deficiencies
 - ▼ Answer all questions that may impact source selection
 - Methods
 - ▼ Written discussions
 - Respond to written questions
 - Or merely have an opportunity to submit revisions to your proposal
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DISCUSSIONS (Cont.)

- ▼ Oral discussions
 - Respond to advance written questions
 - Respond to "real-time" oral questions
 - Observe facilities, equipment - if desired
 - Witness product test - if set forth in RFP
 - Assess personnel (by directing questions or splinter interviews)
 - ▼ Negotiations may even be conducted!
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GOVERNMENT DO'S AND DON'TS

- Agency Must:
 - ▼ Attempt to resolve uncertainties
 - ▼ Point out suspected mistakes
 - ▼ Disclose deficiencies (e.g., failure to meet minimum requirements)
 - Agency Is Prohibited From:
 - ▼ Technical transference (giving your ideas to competitors, or vice-versa)
 - ▼ Technical leveling (telling a proposer how to fix deficiencies)
 - ▼ Auctioning (giving proposers a price to be met)
 - ▼ Otherwise giving away data that would prejudice the competition
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CONTRACTOR DO'S AND DON'TS

- Be Prepared

- ▼ As soon as you submit proposal, look for areas of improvement
 - ▼ Prepare written answers to advance questions
 - ▼ Know your proposal!
 - Conduct Yourself Professionally
 - ▼ Don't run down the competitors
 - ▼ Answer the questions without hyperbole
 - Know the Ground Rules
 - ▼ Agenda
 - ▼ Time available for responses
 - ▼ Methodology
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CONTRACTOR DO'S AND DON'TS (Cont.)

- Answer the Questions - Don't Conduct a Design Review
 - Explain Planned Changes
 - Track and Complete Action Items
 - Decode Why a Question is Being Asked
 - Examples: Questions for Discussions
 - ▼ "Your proposal is deficient in that you didn't describe who performs system engineering." (Leading)
 - ▼ "Provide a demonstration of your automated tool for requirements tracking."
 - ▼ Describe for us how performance requirements are handled."
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CONTRACTOR DO'S AND DON'TS (Cont.)

- ▼ Why don't you put an engineer in residence at subcontractor D?" (Not allowed)
 - ▼ "Please explain the cost and schedule overrun problems you experienced on program z."
 - ▼ Discuss your company's benefits package
 - ▼ Discuss your company's cost accounting system
 - ▼ Discuss your travel policy and process to receive airline tickets and travel advances
 - ▼ Discuss your proposed bonus plan
 - ▼ Discuss your timekeeping practices
- Provide a detailed breakdown of your overhead and G&A pools, to include: vacations, sick leave, holidays and how they relate to the pools
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Importance of Oral Discussions

- Agency Will Get a Good Feel for Your Knowledge and Capabilities

- How You Do in Orals Can Be an Indicator of How Well You'll Do the Job
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Best and Final Offers (BAFOs)

- C.O. Issues Request for BAFOs, including due date
 - Agency May Limit What You Can Do, e.g., DoD Policy is as follows:
 - ▼ Any proposal changes must be fully substantiated, with traceability
 - ▼ No lump sum cost/price reductions w/o justification
 - BAFOs Are Losing Favor - and Multiple BAFOs Will Be Rare
 - Remember, a BAFO Is a Legal Offer that the Agency Can Accept as Is
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FINAL EVALUATIONS -

The Process

- Review/Revise Initial Strengths and Weaknesses
 - Determine which Deficiencies, if Any, Remain (or Are New in the BAFO!)
 - Present Proposed Price or Probable Cost
 - Provide Final Assessment to Source Selection Official
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FINAL EVALUATIONS -

The Aftermath

- Get a Debriefing
 - Protest if You Lost the Job by Violation of the Source Selection Rules
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FINAL EVALUATIONS - Conclusions

- The Government Wants a Large Contingent of Qualified SB/SDB/WOB Proposers
 - Follow These Tips, and Learn Others, so You Can Be a Strong Contender for Job after Job
 - Opportunities Exist where You Can Win- Seek them out!
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Home Pages

- JPL Acquisition Home Page
 - <http://acquisition.jpl.nasa.gov/>

- For terms and conditions:
 - <http://acquisition.jpl.nasa.gov/e2000.htm>
- BBS: (818) 397-7850, 7851
- NASA Procurement Home Page
 - <http://www.hq.nasa.gov/office/procurement>